

PBS MacNeil/Lehrer NEWSHOUR
2 July 1984

PASTORA
INTERVIEW

HUNTER-GAULT: Nicaraguan opposition leader Eden Pastora, widely known as Commander Zero, was in Washington today seeking help for his campaign for free elections in Nicaragua. Pastora met with top State Department officials and U.S. congressmen. The Sandinistas have scheduled elections for November, but opposition leaders have said they are unable to participate because of a lack of political and press freedoms needed to carry out an effective campaign. Pastora, the hero of the Sandinista revolution that drove from power Anastasio Somoza in 1979, broke with the Sandinistas and has been fighting them since the early 1980s. On May 30, Pastora was seriously wounded and five others were killed when a bomb exploded while he was giving a news conference at a jungle camp inside Nicaragua. Pastora has steadfastly refused to join forces with anti-Sandinista guerrillas operating outside of Honduras, because the leaders of that group include former members of Somoza's national guard. Late this afternoon I interviewed Pastora in our studio, with the aid of an interpreter. I started by asking him what, specifically, he wanted from the U.S. officials he met with today. EDEN PASTORA (Nicaraguan opposition leader, through voice of translator): We are developing. We have a certain number of demands, requests, to have free elections in Nicaragua, and to have this done according to democratic laws. And we would like to have freedom of press, also, political freedom, and also win in a framework of rules in which the army, the party and the state will not be one single entity. Let the electoral process take place without the intervention of military forces. As in this case, there are 3,000 Cubans with two Cuban generals come over with all their experience from Angola and Ethiopia and Mozambique. And also according to rules in terms of our not being aligned to one of the two powers which are disputing power in the world. We want to have these conditions met and thus be able to follow electoral process, democratic process, where all Nicaraguans can participate.

HUNTER-GAULT: Well, what help do you think U.S government officials and elected representatives could be to you in this effort? PASTORA: For example, as was the case with the Americans, the Europeans and the Latin Americans, they could tell the Managuan government, let it give way in these demands, in order that they will be able to recognize the process of a legitimate electoral procedure.

HUNTER-GAULT: And you're saying that you and your group are ready to participate in the elections, if these conditions can be established? PASTORA: Definitely, yes. As a Nicaraguan, I believe that the politics comes before military, we would participate. Helping any candidates to

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the presidency, any opposition representatives, if these conditions are met.

HUNTER-GAULT: Do you have any reason to believe that the Sandinistas would go along with this, this proposal?

PASTORA: Yes, of course. There is a reason, and that is, legitimacy in which they are seeking by way of recognition of the Free World, the democratic world.

HUNTER-GAULT: Do you think that they feel that way now more than they did, say, three months or six months ago, that there's more pressure or more of a need for them to be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the United States and the rest of the world? PASTORA: Yes. They do have more of a need. And, the pressures, or at least this recognition for the project, has changed very little. So, what we are seeking, is to have this accentuated, this demand be accentuated, be exercised more forcefully. To have these demands be met, let's say, by democratic parties.

HUNTER-GAULT: Are you prepared to lay down your arms and stop fighting the Sandinista government in order to participate in the elections? PASTORA: Yes. We've always been willing to do this. Against Somoza, for example, we were willing to give up the arms struggle if Somoza granted free elections. At the present time, if the totalitarian government in Managua provides the imposition of these conditions, then we are quite willing to give up the struggle, the armed struggle.

HUNTER-GAULT: But you don't, you don't... Well, let me ask you this. How seriously do the divisions within the contras... You represent one group, there's a group fighting out of Honduras that's backed by the CIA. Are you willing to unite with that group, as it's been reported that the American government has been pressuring to do in order to come with the united front against the Sandinistas in this crusade? PASTORA: Well, in the first place, we're not contra, we're revolutionaries, not counterrevolutionaries. Our positions are Sandinista positions. We want to save the revolution. We're not against the revolution, by any means. We're against deviation from the original process. We are willing to get together with the FDN as we have got together with another six organizations within (unintelligible), always (sic) as long as the series of conditions are met, moral, political, and ideological. Considering that there are three FDNs, one FDN in Miami, one FDN in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and one FDN within Nicaragua in the mountains and on the battlefields, with them we have no problem whatsoever. We have no objection to their activities. And this last FDN in the mountains, we are willing to get together with them immediately, right now, today.

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HUNTER-GAULT: Do you have the, enough funds to continue an effective struggle against the Sandinistas? PASTORA: No, we do not. We've had very little help, very limited aid, sometimes just at subsistence level, which has led us, which has advised us to fight with 8,000 men, a guerrilla war, in inhuman (sic) conditions, minimal logistics, with minimal resources. And in the south we're suffering from hunger. We have very few resources.

MACNEIL: For a broader view of the contra movement and the political storms swirling around Eden Pastora, we turn to Robert Leiken, asso... a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. Mr. Leiken is editor of the recently published book, 'Central America: Anatomy of Conflict,' and is a close observer of Nicaraguan politics. Mr. Leiken, what is the significance of Eden Pastora coming here now?

ROBERT LEIKEN (Carnegie Endowment For International Peace): Well, I think he feels, Robin, that this is a moment in which he can appeal to democratic forces in this country, and in Europe. He has recently received, apparently, the support of *Carlos Andre Perez, the former president of Venezuela, and a very important figure in the Socialist International, vice president of the Socialist International, and, Arturo Cruz, a leading Nicaraguan statesman, Alfredo Cesar, another important Nicaraguan. They all are supporting his efforts right now, and I think he feels that this is the moment to get his political message across.

MACNEIL: Now he's, is he hoping to bring moral pressure from Europe, the rest of the Western world, on the United States, on the Sandinistas, and have them change their ways and grant the freedoms he's just listed, just out of moral pressure? Is that realistic? LEIKEN: Well, it's true that the Sandinistas have been concerned with international public opinion--I wouldn't call it just moral pressure. Obviously, Western countries, Latin American countries have played an economic role and a political role in supporting Nicaragua. And he believes that the Sandinista government wants them to continue that role.

MACNEIL: Mm-hm. I'm not clear, because reports seem to be in conflict, how much he approves or disapproves of the aid the CIA, the Congress through the CIA, was giving to the contras fighting in the north. LEIKEN: Well, I think he disapproved it in the sense that he felt that it was conditioned, that the CIA wished to subordinate the FDN and, for that matter, the Nicaraguan opposition to the United States. I think if aid were given unconditionally to a group that was independent of the United States, Eden Pastora would probably be very pleased.

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MACNEIL: I see. And, now, how effective, when you add up all that's been done by the, with the aid of CIA money by the contras operating in the north, and Eden Pastora in the south, operating out of Costa Rica? What have they achieved in this last two years or so? LEIKEN: Well, Robin, in some ways, I think it's been contradictory. They've obviously received support, material support. But that support, certainly in the case of the north, has created, has created a mechanized army, one dependent on the support. And to some extent, because that group has been at least part of it, associated with the Somozistas, it has limited their...

MACNEIL: Somozistas were the supporters of former President Somoza? LEIKEN: Right. The former national guardsmen, the people who politically have been associated with the past dictator. That is a faction of the group. It's particularly important in the military wing of it. But their association with people who have a pretty shady past means that their appeal in Nicaragua, where discontent towards the government, from all reports, seems to have grown, that that appeal has been limited. So, and in the second place, the association with the United States, such a close association with the United States, again, I think has limited its support or its appeal. As a result, they've gotten, in exchange for military benefits, I think perhaps they've had some, gained some political liabilities.

MACNEIL: And what about Mr. Pastora? What kind of support does he enjoy inside Nicaragua? LEIKEN: Well, I think Pastora's group is essentially fighting a classic guerrilla war which is, whose main source of support is the peasants, the Indians, the population where he is located. I mean, he makes the point, and I think there's some truth to it, that he has gone into Nicaragua and stayed there, whereas, the FDN, the group in the north, has gone into Nicaragua many times and left. He's there, he occupies a piece of territory in the country which is somewhat isolated, but which does have a population. And, at least in southern Nicaragua and in northern Costa Rica, where, which is populated largely by Nicaraguans, there is a great deal of support for him.

MACNEIL: Well, what's going to happen now? Both houses of Congress have refused to give President Reagan the additional \$21 million he wanted for aid, for covert aid to the contras in Nicaragua. That isn't going to happen for a while. They're going to run out of funds, by all reports. What is going to happen? LEIKEN: Well...

MACNEIL: To Pastora's movement and the ADN (sic) movement? LEIKEN: Well, in the first place, I think the FDN movement has accumulated and stockpiled weapons, so

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they'll probably survive for the next few months. In the long run, however, I think they will be hurt. They have been dependent on aerial, on airlifts of supplies into Nicaragua. And that, I think, we'll, you'll begin to see that ending. That will hurt them a great deal. Pastora's group has not been dependent so much on sources like that. Again, I think they've been getting most of their food, logistical support inside the country. I think they'll be hurt somewhat less. They're going to have to find ammunition, guns, elsewhere. And, in that respect, I think they'll also be hurt. But, probably, comparatively, Pastora will be strengthened. Now it might be that the FDN, to the extent that it has been dependent on the United States, will be weakened, and that Pastora will pick up some more support, perhaps even from people fighting up to now within the FDN. That's one possibility. In all events, I wouldn't expect that the war will end. The great problem for these groups fighting against the government, is how to link up with this growing sense of popular discontent. There was a report a week ago in 'The New York Times' a little less than a week ago, lengthy report, showing that there is considerable draft resistance, widespread draft resistance throughout the country. So, far, the insurgent groups have not really linked up with this. There have been numerous deserters, people who have refused military service. And they've gone and enlisted, joined up with Pastora...

MACNEIL: Mm-hm. LEIKEN: ...with the FDN. But there hasn't been a real linkage, yet.